

Washington, DC — Congressman Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore.), a longtime champion of reforming the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and co-founder of the Congressional Corps Reform Caucus, expressed optimism about the bi-partisan Water Resources Development Act of 2003 (WRDA), passed by the House of Representatives today. The legislation has been delayed for the past year because it did not adequately address the concerns of legislators and activists pushing for needed reforms to the Corps.

“Although the Corps of Engineers often takes the blame when Congress and other outside forces politicize the process, the WRDA bill passed by Congress today is an improvement over previous proposals,” said Blumenauer.

The Army Corps of Engineers is responsible for the construction and maintenance of over 1,500 federal water resources projects in the United States. In recent years, several government and private studies have found that the Army Corps of Engineers’ process is often biased in favor of large projects, lacks adequate environmental safeguards in its planning process, and has manipulated data to secure approval for major projects. As a result, there is a large and growing consensus that the Corps’ process must be modernized to ensure that civil works projects are economically and environmentally sound.

The WRDA bill passed today included a key amendment authored by Blumenauer to address these issues. It provides the Corps with greater flexibility in its planning process to consider both the economic benefits of environmental restoration projects and the environmental benefits of economic restoration projects. Blumenauer’s amendment also requires the Corps to calculate the residual flooding risks of projects, such as the impact downstream of a structural project like a levee. The intent of the amendment is to encourage the Corps to do more non-structural flood control projects, whose benefits are harder to calculate. The bill also contains a provision which subjects large and controversial projects to an independent peer review.

“This WRDA bill is not perfect, but represents a small step forward,” argued Blumenauer. “I’ll continue to work for even more ambitious reforms as Congress moves forward with future WRDA bills.”